

fact sheet: finback whale

FINBACK WHALE (Balaenoptera physalus)

Adult Length: 60-70 feet

Adult Weight: 60-70 tons

Distribution: Worldwide

Estimated Western North Atlantic Population: 7,200-10,000

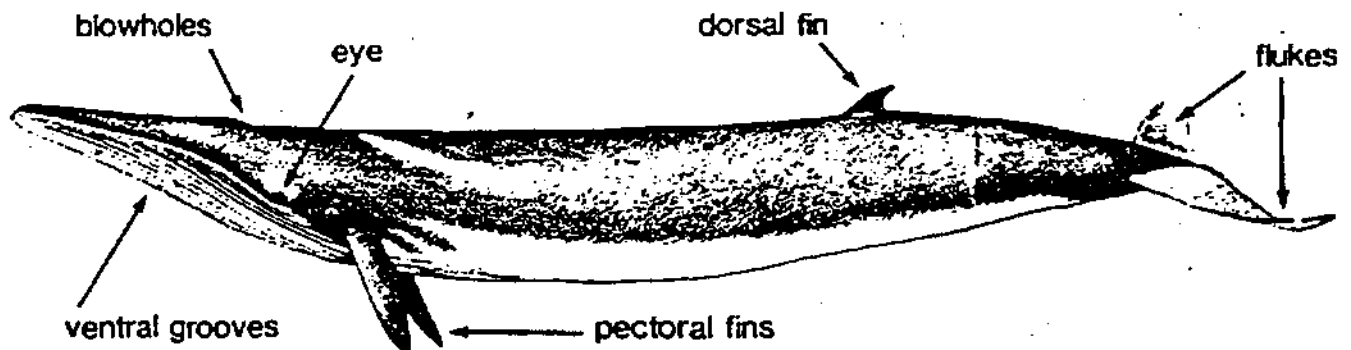
Diet: Fish and krill

Gestation Period: 12 months

The most common large whale in the Gulf of Maine is the finback whale. Second in size only to the blue whale, a finback may reach a length of 70 feet. Because of its streamlined shape and swimming speeds up to 20 mph, it is sometimes called the "greyhound of the sea."

As its name suggests, this whale has a prominent dorsal fin. The most unique field mark for this whale, however, is the uneven coloration of the lips and baleen. On the left side, both the lips and baleen are dark; on the right side, the lower lip, the first third of the baleen, and sometimes the upper lip, are white or pale gray. The reason for this asymmetric coloration is not known. Some scientists theorize that it may be used in feeding, to herd or startle prey. Or perhaps the reverse, to camouflage the whale as it hunts.

Finback calves are born in winter. The newborn whales are about 20 feet long and nurse for 6-8 months. Mother whales may provide calves with as much as 100 gallons of milk per day. By the time they are weaned, the calves may be 36 feet long.



New England Aquarium Education Department Central Wharf, Boston MA

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